

CONVENIENCE FOODS



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What Are Convenience Foods?



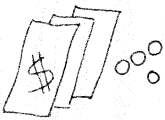
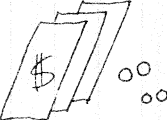
"*Convenience foods*...refers to foods which have services added to the basic ingredients to reduce the amount of preparation required in the home." This definition for convenience foods has been used by the United States Department of Agriculture. Characteristics that may be attributed to convenience foods include:

- The distribution of preparation time is changed.
- Eliminate some steps in preparation.
- Storage is easy.
- Reduced storage space is needed.
- Transportation from the market is easy because of less bulk or less weight.
- Quality retention may be greater.

How Much of the Food Dollar Is Spent for Convenience Foods?




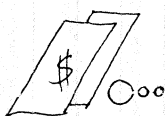
The USDA Food Consumption Studies of 1955 and 1965 provide information on family food expenditures. The buying practices of families for 32 convenience foods were analyzed.¹ In 1955 spend-

SPEND & SAVE (Drexel menus)





CONVENIENCE	MENU I	HOME PREPARED
 <p>TIME 34 MIN.</p>	<p>CHICKEN VEGETABLE SOUP</p> <p>ROAST BEEF, GRAVY, POTATOES, PEAS AND WHOLE-KERNEL CORN</p> <p>CLUB ROLLS</p> <p>CREAM PUFF WITH VANILLA FILLING</p> <p>COFFEE</p>	 <p>TIME 2 HOURS 23 MIN.</p>
 <p>MONEY \$3.13</p>		 <p>MONEY \$3.22</p>

¹ The convenience foods included in this analysis were: canned and frozen fruits and vegetables; canned, frozen, and fresh fruit juice; canned vegetable juice; frozen, canned and dehydrated potatoes and sweet potatoes; potato chips and sticks; ground beef; frankfurters; other lunch meat; mixtures with and without meat; canned and condensed soups; dry and dehydrated soups; pancake mixes; biscuit, roll, and muffin mixes; cake mixes; bakery bread; other bakery products; ready-to-eat breakfast cereals; instant coffee; frozen and powdered fruit ades and punches; canned and dry milk; frozen desserts; pudding and pie fillings; and icings.



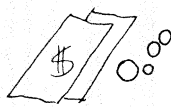
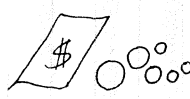
Preparation time included reading recipe directions and cleaning up.

CONVENIENCE	MENU II	HOME PREPARED
 <p>TIME 36 MIN.</p>	BAKED FILLET OF FLOUNDER WITH MUSHROOM SAUCE BROCCOLI SPEARS STEWED TOMATOES BANANA-NUT SALAD PLAIN MUFFIN ICE CREAM COFFEE	 <p>TIME 1 HOUR 1 MIN.</p>
 <p>MONEY \$2.15</p>		 <p>MONEY \$2.52</p>

Food costs were averaged from four supermarkets.

CONVENIENCE	MENU III	HOME PREPARED
 <p>TIME 1 HOUR 8 MIN.</p>	GRILLED FRANKFURTERS BAKED BEANS CABBAGE SLAW WITH-PEPPER RINGS BOSTON BROWN BREAD FRUIT COCKTAIL AND COOKIES TEA	 <p>TIME 2 HOURS 48 MIN.</p>
 <p>MONEY \$2.01</p>		 <p>MONEY \$2.00</p>

24 of 31 convenience foods studied required under 5 minutes to prepare.

CONVENIENCE	MENU IV	HOME PREPARED
 <p>TIME 13 MIN.</p>	CREAM OF TOMATO SOUP CHICKEN PIE TOSSED SALAD, FRENCH DRESSING FRUIT BOWL TEA	 <p>TIME 2 HOURS 7 MIN.</p>
 <p>MONEY \$2.37</p>		 <p>MONEY \$1.97</p>

ing for convenience foods was 27 percent of the total purchased foods; by spring 1965, it was slightly over 30 percent.

Who Buys Convenience Foods?

The chart below shows that all families regardless of place of residence or income group are using convenience foods and in increasing amounts. The general tendency for farm households to show larger than average percentage increases probably reflects their tendency to purchase more of their food through market channels in 1965 than 1955 and to consume foods more like non-farm households do. However, the amount farm families spent for these foods was still considerably less than what urban families spent. Low-income families indicate a greater shift to convenience foods than do other families. Part of this increase in 1965 for low-income families may be due to the fact that the survey includes one-person households which the 1955 survey did not. This one-person household group probably includes many older persons who would have limited incomes.

CLASSIFICATION OF FAMILIES	SPENDING FOR 32 CONVENIENCE FOODS AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL FOOD PURCHASED	
	1955	1965
Urbanization		
North Central Region		
Urban	27.4	30.5
Rural non-farm	29.9	33.5
Rural farm	37.4	41.1
Income Group		
Low one-third	27.3	32.1
Middle one-third	28.0	30.8
High one-third	26.6	29.2

The director of communications of one well known food processing company says, "Food prepared the way Grandma made it probably has perhaps one generation left. In the 15 to 25 years, 90 percent of this country's housewives will be using convenience foods."

How Do Convenience Foods Compare With Home Prepared Foods When Cost and Time for Preparation Are Considered?

Drexel Institute released results of a study on time and cost comparisons of seven menus suitable for lunch or dinner using convenience foods and home-made counterparts. The original study was reported in 1963 and updated using 1967 market prices. Recipes of home-prepared foods were adapted to keep ingredients, portions, and nutritive values equivalent to convenience foods.

The following illustration compares the time and money expenditures spent for the meals served from convenience and home prepared foods.

Of 31 convenience foods studied, 25 required a total preparation time of less than five minutes each. Of 31 home-prepared items studied, only two could be prepared within five minutes; 14 required 20 minutes or more. If the cost of preparation time is computed at a level of \$50 weekly (plus carfare, social security, and meals) or \$1.56 hourly, then the homemaker trades 3¢ for 1½ hours saving in preparation time when she buys the convenience foods. The homemaker needs to decide whether she can realize greater economic or even social satisfaction by spending the time in some other way.

Are Convenience Foods Equally Nutritious to Their Home Prepared Counterparts?

Recommendations for the *minimum* daily food needs of individuals are these:

Meat Group—2 2-ounce servings lean meat, fish or poultry or eggs, cheese, or alternates as dry beans, peas, nuts

Vegetable-Fruit Group—4 servings (½ cup)
1 good source of vitamin C daily
1 good source of vitamin A every other day

Enriched Breads and Cereals—4 servings

Milk—Adults—2 or more cups
Teenagers—4 or more cups
Children—9 to 12—3 or more cups
Children under 9—2 to 3 cups

This guide does not specify that foods must be home-prepared to provide essential nutrients. In other words, the form of food chosen can vary as fresh, frozen or canned fruits and vegetables, fresh or frozen meats, commercially baked or home baked breads. There are certain questions that the homemaker who uses convenience foods regularly should ask herself to assess nutritional contributions of daily meals:

- Do additional protein-rich foods (cheese, milk, eggs, meat) need to be added to the menu either as a salad or dessert or in the preparation of the main dish?
- Are size of servings adequate to meet food needs of family members of different ages?
- Are bread, cereal products (rice, macaroni, spaghetti) and baked foods enriched with B vitamins and iron? Read labels to be sure.

- Are foods and beverages enriched with Vitamin C enriched at a level adequate to substitute for vitamin C-rich foods?
- Does the menu allow for use of deep green and deep yellow vegetables since these are less often found than other vegetables in commercially prepared combination foods and meals?
- Do menus include some foods with texture because many prepared foods lack crispness?
- Can family members “afford” the extra calories from sauces and gravies in which many prepared foods are processed?
- Do menus vary so that children have an opportunity to learn to eat a wide variety of food?

Convenience foods may be selected to fit into a basic meal pattern as well as foods prepared from “scratch.” The following guide may be adapted to fit different family eating schedules.

Breakfast

Fruit or fruit juice (preferably citrus or high in vitamin C)
 Cereal and milk and/or other protein rich food
 Bread — Butter or Margarine
 Milk for all
 Other beverage, if desired

Lunch or Supper

A protein-rich food (meat, fish, poultry, eggs, cheese or an alternate)
 A vegetable or fruit or both
 Bread — Butter or Margarine
 Dessert, if desired
 Milk

Dinner

A protein-rich food (meat, fish, poultry, eggs, cheese, or an alternate)
 Two vegetables — potato or other starchy vegetable — a dark green or yellow vegetable frequently
 Bread — Butter or Margarine
 Dessert
 Milk, or other beverage, if desired

Is Quality of Convenience Foods Equal To That of Home Prepared Foods?

This question can evoke much argument depending on who evaluates the products or on what product is evaluated. Decision as to the level of quality of a product is based on one's standard for a product. Individual standards for what is good quality in even home prepared foods vary widely. There is a wide range in the quality of convenience foods available to the consumer. Price cannot be assumed to be a direct indication of quality. Factors such as color, texture, and flavor that influence quality are not easily standardized and regulated in the food industry. Some consumers appear to be willing to accept lower quality in commercially prepared products than those prepared in their own kitchens.

Quality of a convenience food appears to vary over time. Many homemakers who were not pleased with the original cake mixes

now rely on improved cake mixes completely. Certainly the quality of many canned and frozen food products has increased as a result of improved technology and in response to consumer demand. The consumer does have a definite responsibility toward the level of quality of food that continues to be offered by the food industry. The consumer must expect and demand high quality convenience foods for the dollars she spends.

Can the Consumer Feel Confident That Additives in Convenience Foods Are Safe?

A food additive can be defined as a substance or a mixture of substances other than a basic food stuff which is present in food as a result of any aspect of production, processing, storage or packaging.

The Food Additives Amendment to the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act enacted in 1958 provides that no additive can be used in foods unless the Food and Drug Administration after a careful review of the test data agrees that the additive is safe at the intended levels of use. The law also requires that an intentional additive not only must be safe in its intended use but implies that it must also perform its intended function. A Color Additives Amendment was enacted in 1960 to assure safety of food colors. Various chemicals have been prohibited by Food and Drug Administration either as hazardous or because their use could deceive the customer into thinking that a food was better than it really was or because they could camouflage poor manufacturing practices.

The use of additives makes foods more colorful, more flavorful and in some cases more nutritious. They inhibit the staling, molding, or bacterial decomposition of foods, the browning of fruit and in other ways prevent or retard the deterioration of foods. They stabilize foods by inhibiting the separation of salad oils or the collapse of whipped toppings, for example.

The wide variety of convenience foods available today is possible only because food additives are available and used.

Should Homemaker Use Convenience Foods?

Convenience foods are not new and many foods that are convenient have been around such a long time we take them for granted. Many of the more recently developed convenience food products are here to stay. Some new products will be introduced by the food industry that will not survive because homemakers do not continue to buy them. Only about 500 of 5000 to 6000 new

products introduced survive the first year. Each homemaker must make her own decision how much convenience she wishes to buy. She makes these decisions based on:

- Her preference for the convenient product
- Time available for food preparation and service
- Knowledge and skills in cooking
- Number of people in family
- Attitude toward cooking and convenience foods
- Price and quality of food available in convenient and traditional forms
- Attitude of the family toward convenience foods

The food processor who has developed quality food in a convenient form usually provides instructions for final preparation in the consumer's kitchen and in some cases storage recommendations. The homemaker who wishes to gain greatest satisfaction from the product will read and follow the directions. A new cookbook with suggestions for use of convenience foods in recipes would be useful to many homemakers as they increasingly use new foods or old foods in new convenient forms. All indications are that the kitchen revolution will continue as homemakers and other family members increase their desire to be free from routine household tasks.

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